



A Portrait



OF NONPROFITS SERVING CHILDREN IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C., METROPOLITAN AREA

Nonprofits in the Washington, D.C., region provide essential support for the education, personal development, and social welfare of local children. Not only do nonprofits provide vital social services, such as clothing, food, and shelter, but they also supply children with after-school opportunities, tutoring and mentoring, youth sports leagues, and much more. To provide services effectively, local nonprofits must situate themselves in areas that are accessible to children. Because it is crucial to understand how the locations of these groups compare to the residential patterns of children, the Urban Institute has conducted the first systematic examination of the spatial distribution of the 1,114 local child-related nonprofits in the D.C. region. The study reveals several important facts.

Did You Know?

There is a wide spatial disparity in nonprofit resources for children and youth across jurisdictions in the D.C. metropolitan region.

- The District has the most child-related nonprofits (347), followed by Montgomery County (220 groups) and Fairfax County (179 organizations). With only 14 groups, Manassas has the fewest number of child and youth providers in the region.
- Falls Church has the most nonprofits per 1,000 children in the region. Prince William County has the least.
- Total nonprofit spending is highest in the District (\$503 million), followed by Montgomery County (\$366 million) and Fairfax County (\$169 million).
- Falls Church has the highest per capita nonprofit spending on children in the region. Prince William County has the lowest.
- Nonprofits across the jurisdictions emphasize different program areas. In the District, child-related nonprofits are more likely to supply social welfare services than youth development and recreational services.

There is a slight mismatch between the locational distribution of child and youth nonprofit resources and neighborhoods where high percentages of children live.

- Fewer than two of every five nonprofit child service providers in the region are located in neighborhoods where a high percentage (25 percent or more) of children live.
- The mismatch between the location of nonprofits and the neighborhoods where a high proportion of children live is most pronounced in the District.
- Nonprofits in neighborhoods that are densely populated with children spend less, on average, than nonprofits in less densely populated neighborhoods.





There are three encouraging signs in the spatial distribution of nonprofit resources in neighborhoods with significant child and adolescent needs.

- The composition of nonprofit provision in neighborhoods with high rates of child poverty (19 percent of children or more) is skewed toward social welfare organizations—the type of child-serving groups that often directly addresses the effects of child poverty.
- Child-related nonprofits in neighborhoods with high child poverty are generally on equal financial footing with groups in areas where child poverty is less severe.
- In the District, the jurisdiction with the highest child poverty rate in the region, there is a near perfect spatial connection between nonprofits and high child poverty neighborhoods. Fifty-six percent of all D.C. neighborhoods have a high child poverty rate, and 56 percent of all D.C. nonprofits are located in these neighborhoods.

The key determinant of the location of nonprofits that serve children in the region is a high child poverty rate.

- Higher rates of child poverty in neighborhoods mean greater levels of nonprofit activity, particularly among social welfare organizations.
- The needs of poorer children and their limited ability to travel for services may cause some nonprofits to locate in areas with high child poverty.
- Other demographic and socioeconomic neighborhood indicators—such as neighborhood size, racial/ethnic composition, and median household income—have little bearing on child and youth nonprofit locational patterns in the D.C. region.

The Bottom Line

The findings of this analysis are mixed. On the one hand, there is a clear disparity in nonprofit resources for children across jurisdictions and neighborhoods. On the other, some nonprofits, particularly social welfare organizations, choose to locate in neighborhoods with severe pockets of child poverty. While this may signal a potentially inefficient distribution of the overall nonprofit resources in the region, many neighborhoods with significant social and economic needs have some degree of nonprofit infrastructure, presumably providing poor children with physical access to nonprofit services.

Looking Ahead

The accessibility of nonprofit resources is vital to strong social service systems; therefore, these findings should ring a cautionary note. Community leaders may want to explore methods to reduce the disparity in charitable activity for children and youth across the region. One option is to invest in the limited number of nonprofits that operate in underserved neighborhoods. Another is to promote capacity building strategies through start-up grants and general support to develop new nonprofits in these areas. Community leaders may also consider building on the presence of social welfare nonprofits in neighborhoods with high child poverty through better understanding the intricate interplay of economic and organizational factors that encourage groups to locate in high-need areas. In the end, understanding these locational incentives can help community officials cultivate the capacity of existing nonprofits and develop new groups in high-poverty neighborhoods.



THE URBAN INSTITUTE

2100 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
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Phone: 202-833-7200

E-mail: paffairs@ui.urban.org

Web: <http://www.urban.org>

For more information on children and youth services in the Washington, D.C., metro area and this project, see the web site above or contact: Eric C. Twombly, etwombly@ui.urban.org / Jennifer Claire Auer, jauer@ui.urban.org.

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